

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 30th January, 2018 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors: M Rowley (Chair Items 1 - 2), C Hamilton (Chair Items 3 - 4) S Haslam (Chair Items 5 - 8), S Aitchison, G Edgar, E Jardine, W McAteer, T Miers, S Mountford, T Weatherston.

Apologies Ms J Aitchison, Mr G Clark, Mr L Mendoza, Ms J Sibbald.

Also present:- Councillors: H Anderson, S Bell, K Chapman and S Marshall.

In Attendance:- Chief Financial Officer, Service Director Children and Young People, Head of Economic Development, Passenger Transport Manager, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (J Turnbull)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present Mr J Clark

1. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Rowley chaired the meeting for consideration of the Economic Development business.

2. BROADBAND UPDATE

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of report by the Executive Director updating Members on the progress being made in delivering improved broadband services in the Scottish Borders. Digital connectivity was critical to the economic development and competitiveness of the Scottish Borders. Scottish Borders Council had contributed significantly to the roll-out of the Scottish Government's Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme, spending £8.4M over two years to help extend the roll-out as far as possible in the Scottish Borders. The Council Administration had identified digital connectivity as a key priority in its 'Connected Borders' plan. More than 130 new superfast broadband cabinets and exchange upgrades had been delivered as part of the roll-out, connecting over 31,800 premises in the Scottish Borders. Figures provided by the DSSB programme indicated that up to the end of September 2017, 82.7% of premises had been connected to fibre enabled cabinets or exchanges. The DSSB roll-out, with added 'Gainshare' funding, would continue until the end of 2018, and aimed to connect 94.9% of all the premises in the area. Although progress was being made in delivering the DSSB programme, there remained a number of challenging issues to be addressed in relation to providing superfast broadband services across the Scottish Borders. One of the key issues was that although a home or business might be connected to the new fibre enabled technology, if they were located too far from the cabinet or exchange, then it was likely that there would be no improvement in their broadband service. This was acknowledged as the 'long lines' issue. The Scottish Government had announced its commitment to investing £600m to extend superfast broadband access to 100% of premises across Scotland by the end of 2021. The Scottish Government was delivering a national approach to this issue, putting in place a "Reaching 100% Programme" (R100) to cover the remaining premises where the DSSB roll-out would not reach. As well as

providing connections for those premises that had not been covered by the DSSB roll-out, R100 would also address the 'long lines' issue. The R100 programme also raised the superfast broadband speeds being targeted, up from 24Mbps to 30Mbps.

- 2.2 Members discussed the report and agreed the importance of the facilitation of a Scottish Borders Digital Network. It was also suggested that representatives from the Network be invited to attend Local Area Partnership meetings, when appropriate. Members also requested that accessible information should be available on the Council's website and include the planned rollout timescales. In response to questions, Mr McGrath clarified that the target of 93.8% was the original target specified with BT Open Reach for connection of premises to Superfast Broadband. However, although connections might be in place, this did not mean that all properties would be connected immediately, and this would be one of the challenges the R100 programme sought to address.

DECISION

(a) NOTED:-

- (i) the progress made on delivering the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;**
- (ii) the delays with Community Broadband Scotland being experienced by local community groups and raise these concerns with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity in the letter agreed in (c)(i) below.**

(b) WELCOMED the Scottish Government announcement that the R100 tender process was underway.

(c) AGREED:-

- (i) to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity to encourage the Scottish Government to maximise the full-fibre coverage R100 programme, to promote an 'Outside-In' approach to its delivery and to urge that work on the programme started as quickly as possible for the Scottish Borders;**
- (ii) that the Executive Director work with partners in adjoining local authorities to develop a viable application to the Local Full Fibre Network Challenge Fund, noting that it might be delivered through the City Regional Deal partnership or the South of Scotland Economic Partnership;**
- (iii) to ask the South of Scotland Economic Partnership to make Digital Connectivity, uptake of digital services and the development of digital skills for businesses and individuals a priority for the Interim Arrangements Workplan;**
- (iv) to express concern over the range of issues affecting the delivery of superfast broadband in the rural areas of the Scottish Borders and ask that these were raised with The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary when they met the South of Scotland Alliance in February 2018;**
- (v) to the facilitation of a Scottish Borders Digital Network to encourage coordination and information sharing between key local stakeholders with an interest in digital; and**

- (vi) **that the Executive Director prepare a further update report once the outcome of the initial R100 procurement was available.**

EDUCATION BUSINESS

Present: Ms A Ferahi, Mr G Jarvie, Ms C Thorburn, Mr I Topping.

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Carol Hamilton chaired the meeting for consideration of Education Business.

3. ADMISSIONS POLICY

There had been circulated copies of a report proposing that the revised Scottish Borders Admissions Policy 2018 was approved by Members. The previous version was approved in 2012. The current version had been revised to take into account best practice across Scotland. The Policy now included advice on class composition and established a date by which schools would not be expected to re-composite/re-timetable classes. The report also updated procedures in terms of waiting lists when placing requests were refused. The updated Policy was responsive in clarifying procedures in areas which had led to dispute with families in recent years. In particular, the process to be followed when parents/carers made placing requests during the school year and when children were unable to get a space in their catchment school during the school year. The changes being made would provide clear guidance to Headteachers and ensured greater stability in class composition after census date in September in each year. The changes also provided parents/carers with clear information and had been made in response to parental feedback during times of dispute. In response to questions, Ms Manson clarified that extensive community consultation had taken place, including feedback received from Parent Council meetings and discussions, in particular, with rural school such as Broughton and Newlands. With regard to placing requests, Ms Manson explained that requests were not granted until a detailed assessment had been carried out. There was no payment of fees between authorities, charges only being made for any additional provision to meet the child's additional support needs.

DECISION

AGREED the revised Scottish Borders Council Admission Policy 2018.

4. CLOSING THE POVERTY-RELATED ATTAINMENT GAP

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director, Children and Young People. The report explained that Scottish Borders Council had a strong commitment to Reducing Inequalities and worked in partnership with a range of partners to address the barriers that families might face in their daily lives. In the newly established vision set out by the Council in 'Connected Borders' there was a strong commitment to 'ensuring that the vulnerable and marginalised were included and considered in every action we take' and that 'together we needed to ensure that no-one and no community was left behind but that we grew and developed together'. Within this new vision there were specific themes that provided a focus on improving the lives of the most vulnerable. Communities of wellbeing identified a commitment to taking a whole community approach to education to raise attainment and 'close the poverty related attainment gap', to deliver extensive work on tackling substance misuse and improving mental health support for the most vulnerable young people. Communities of Caring identified a commitment to family support services focused on early intervention, mentoring and parenting.
- 4.2 There were many existing structures and workstreams that were currently focused on developing support for the most vulnerable in communities in the Scottish Borders. The new vision provided an opportunity for a review of the structures and priorities for action enabling the Council and its Partners within the Community Planning Partnership to set out a new five year plan. Work had already started with an initial workshop involving a

broad range of community partners and the creation of the Area Partnerships structure; currently holding community workshops aimed at identifying priorities within the locality forums. The Children and Young People's Directorate was sighted on Reducing Inequalities developments through the Director's participation in the Corporate Management Team, the Community Planning Partnership Board, the Reducing Inequalities Delivery Team and the Children and Young People's Leadership Group. This broader context of Reducing Inequalities work was a key factor in supporting the 'closing the poverty' related attainment gap priority set by the National Improvement Framework for all schools. The report provided an update on current attainment levels between the most and least disadvantaged children in the Scottish Borders and the actions being taken to narrow the attainment gap in schools. The report also provided background information on how poverty was defined, the effects of poverty and recent statistics on the levels of children living in poverty within the Scottish Borders. The attainment gap that currently existed between the children living in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas in the Scottish Borders was presented within the report and an analysis provided across the stages of schooling. A key priority was raising attainment in numeracy. A significant part of the report outlined the extensive work taking place in schools to intervene and address the poverty related attainment gap. Part of the report outlined how the Pupil Equity Fund was being spent in schools in support of this work. Guidance that had been developed and training that had taken place were presented and the work of the Quality Improvement Officers and the Attainment Officers highlighted. Significant work was taking place to address the challenges presented by the impact that living in poverty had upon the attainment and wellbeing of children and their families. Tackling Child Poverty was not simply a school issue and the work of the Area Partnerships, the Reducing Inequalities CPP Strategic Group and the Children's Leadership Group were noted to signal the broader role being played by partners and Council staff across Directorates; this work would be subject to more detailed reports in other forums. There was considerable work taking place within and across schools to 'close the poverty related attainment gap'. The work was in its infancy and the challenge was significant. However the approach being taken and the commitment being demonstrated evidenced that very robust processes were in place to address this challenge. The work was being closely monitored by Attainment Officers and Quality Improvement Officers and high quality professional learning had taken place so far. This work would be complemented by the work of broader partnership groups moving forward.

- 4.3 Ms Manson was joined by the two Attainment Officers, Mr Macklin and Ms Wharton, to present the main points in the report and provide clarity around the data supplied. Ms Manson advised that 'closing the poverty related attainment gap' was not just an educational responsibility, but that a community owned, collective solution was required. Community groups and Area Partnerships would play a key role in developing this work going forward. Referring to Hawick and Kelso High Schools she explained the range in data, and highlighted the difference in the percentage of families claiming free school meals in comparison with those claiming clothing grants. This indicated that low income families were not always claiming the benefits they were entitled to because of cultural stigma and this was one of the challenges schools had to address. The statistics also showed that areas perceived as affluent, such as Coldingham, Coldstream and Yetholm, when analysed portrayed a different view, the data providing an understanding of impact in terms of fuel, digital, accessibility and 'in work poverty'. She gave as an example, a working family living in Coldstream who wanted to attend their child's parents' evening at Berwickshire High School. This could entail a five hour journey, if public transport was available, with additional cost for the family.
- 4.4 Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) was then discussed and Ms Wharton explained that this was not for the whole school but targeted to specific pupils, regardless of their attainment level. She gave as examples three PEF projects, the first of which was Edenside Primary Schools' PATHS programme. The programme's aim was for 'Better friendships, happier children, better ready to learn in the classroom'. The Headteacher had reported that the programme had achieved a measurable impact and that children were calmer, happier

and their learning had improved. Earlston High School and associated primaries had pooled their grant within their cluster. The cluster supported a numeracy intervention, and as a result provided additional 1:1 support for targeted pupils, four times a week. Progress was tracked on a weekly basis and every child in the intervention had achieved their targets. A small number of children, who had previously sat below their peers, were now achieving the highest scores in their maths class. The final example given was Chirnside Primary School, where spelling and reading had been identified, the school could now demonstrate the narrowing of the gap between reading and spelling.

- 4.5 In response to questions, Ms Manson explained that they had trialled some work in early years to maximise benefit entitlement and this had been positive. They were also investigating models from other authorities. The Leader added that the Council were reforming the Welfare Advisory Service to form a one stop shop. This meant that anyone claiming a benefit would also receive advice on other benefits they were entitled to claim. With regard to obesity in children, Ms Manson advised that the Council were working with NHS Borders, leading a programme which linked to type 2 diabetes. Schools were also starting emotional and wellbeing programmes. Mr Robertson added that the Council would also be raising the issue around funding through COSLA and the need for a greater share of resources in view of the challenges a rural authority faced. Members commended the report and the work of the team in providing the statistics. Ms Manson advised that she was pleased to provide sessions to Members to discuss further, if required. She also extended an invitation to Members to attend their local schools to observe ongoing poverty proofing activities and PEF in progress.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) **to commend the work taking place at all levels to address the poverty related attainment gap in schools;**
- (b) **to note the significant change in the levels of children living in poverty within the Scottish Borders; and**
- (c) **that the Director, Children and Young People making an approach to the appropriate Ministers and Learning Directorate Senior Officers in the Scottish Government, to discuss the possibility of innovation funding in recognition of the increasing child poverty levels in the Scottish Borders.**

MEMBER

Councillor Mountford left the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Haslam chaired the meeting for consideration of Other Business.

5. MINUTE

The minute of the Executive Committee of 5 December 2017 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED by signature by the Chairman.

6. ANNUAL TAXI FARES REVIEW 2017/18

With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of 17 October 2017, there had been circulated a report advising Members of the recent public consultation undertaken in connection with the statutory review of the current scale of charges for taxi fares. The Council as licensing authority was required in terms of Section 17 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1981 ("the Act") to review the scales for fares and other charges in connection with the hire of a taxi at intervals not exceeding 18 months of the

last review. A report on the consultation with the taxi trade was presented to the Council's Executive on 17 October 2017. Following the Executives' decision to keep fares at their current rates, the Act required the Council to then undertake a public consultation on taxi rates. The outcome of the consultation was detailed in the report. It was noted that only six people had responded to the consultation, two of which were taxi operators.

DECISION

AGREED that:-

- (a) the taxi fare rates should remain unaltered in line with the outcome of the Council's established formula; and
- (b) Taxi Operators were written to in accordance with the Act and informed of the Council's decision.

7. PRIVATE BUSINESS

AGREED under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in the Appendix to this minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of part 1 of schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

8. PRIVATE MINUTE

The Private Minute of the Executive Committee of 5 December had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am.